

XXXVI.—*Letters, Extracts, Notices, &c.*

WE have received the following letters, addressed “to the Editors of ‘The Ibis’” :—

SIRS,—In reply to Count Salvadori’s letter in the last number of ‘The Ibis,’ I think the following remarks will prove of interest.

The British Museum collection contains only five fully adult red-billed examples of *Oriolus monachus*: in all these birds the subterminal black band across the outer tail-feathers is either very faintly indicated or obsolete. Count Salvadori has kindly sent me four fully adult red-billed examples of this species for comparison. These differ in a marked degree from the specimens in the British Museum, inasmuch as all have the black subterminal band on the outer tail-feathers strongly developed, though they differ one from another. For example:

*a.* ♂ ad. Kagima, Shoa. The black band on the outer tail-feathers is very strongly developed; 1·3 inch wide.

*b* & *c.* ♂ ad. Forest of Fekerie-ghem. The black band is much narrower; in *b* 0·7 inch wide, in *c* 0·4.

*d.* ♀ ad. Daimbi. The black band is very strongly developed; about 1·4 inch wide.

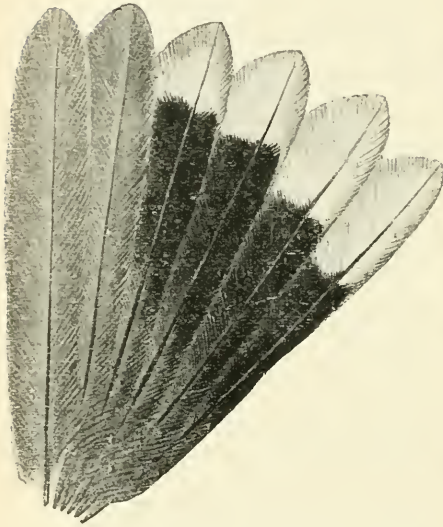
It will thus be seen that, on comparing the four adult birds sent by Count Salvadori from the Turin Museum with the five in the British Museum, there is a marked difference between the two series; for while the British Museum specimens (fig. 2, p. 566), though fully adult birds, show hardly a trace of the black subterminal band across the outer tail-feathers, which is said by Count Salvadori to denote maturity, this character is strongly marked in the specimens sent from Turin (fig. 1, p. 566).

Count Salvadori has also kindly sent me for examination three immature specimens of *O. monachus*. All these have the tail similar to that of our adult birds and show scarcely a trace of a black subterminal band. On the other hand, the black-billed type of *O. meneliki*, which Count Salvadori considered to be the young of *O. monachus*, has, as the

description notes, the black subterminal band across the tail *well developed*, as in the adult birds sent by Count Salvadori.

Again, comparing the Museum series of five adult specimens of *O. monachus*, plus the type of *O. meuliki*, with the whole series from the Turin Museum, we find the characters of the markings on the outer tail-feathers entirely reversed; for the former leads one to believe that the adult has no subterminal band and that the young has, whereas in the Turin series the reverse obtains.

Fig. 1.



Six lateral rectrices of specimen *a* (♂ ad.) of *Oriolus monachus* (Mus. Torin.).

Fig. 2.



Six lateral rectrices of *Oriolus monachus*, adult specimen with black band most defined (Mus. Brit.).

But, after all, I have very little doubt that Count Salvadori is right, and that all the birds mentioned above belong to one species, *O. monachus*; and that the presence or absence of the black subterminal band across the outer tail-feathers is of very little importance, being characteristic of neither age nor sex. Under the circumstances the mistake was almost unavoidable, and though I regret having advised Mr. Weld-Blundell and Lord Lovat to describe as a new

species what now appears to be an old one, there was, as I have shown, every excuse for such an error of judgment.

Yours &c.,

British Museum (Natural History),  
May 1st, 1900.

W. R. OGILVIE GRANT.

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SIRS,—I have lately returned from Palermo, where I made a most pleasant visit to my friend Mr. Joseph S. Whitaker at his beautiful villa of Malfitano. Among the many attractions of the place, one of the most interesting is the new Zoological Museum, situated in the beautifully wooded grounds, close to the villa, which was opened on the first day of the current year, 1900. On visiting the museum, after ascending a short flight of white marble steps, and passing through a vestibule, one enters a spacious hall or gallery, illuminated by top-light. Ranged round the walls of this hall are large glass cabinets, containing mounted specimens of Italian and Sicilian birds; also some collections of small mammals from Sicily, Tunis, and Marocco, and two cabinets containing birds' eggs. On the walls are some magnificent heads of red deer from North Italy, and a good collection of gazelle- and antelope-heads from Tunisia. Among other trophies which adorn the walls is a fine head of the alpine ibex, killed by Umberto, King of Italy, in the Val d'Aosta, and presented by His Majesty to Whitaker. There is also the head of a fallow-deer, which was shot by Victor Emanuel. In the centre of the hall, directly under the skylight, are ten large cabinets, containing the extensive collection of birds formed by the late Lord Lilford, which was purchased by Whitaker after the death of our late esteemed President, and is preserved intact by its present owner. This collection, which is very complete as regards birds from the Mediterranean district generally, and Spain in particular, is especially rich in Raptores, and can also boast of a very fine series of skins of that rare Gull, *Larus audouini*, of which there are seven or eight fine specimens, all collected by Lord Lilford himself on the coasts of Sardinia. The cabinets containing this large collection are

very crowded, and the specimens are not yet arranged in scientific order.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the Museum, and certainly that in which Whitaker takes chief pride and delight, is the very fine series of Tunisian birds collected by himself during his many expeditions in the interior of the Regency. This collection, which is in the skin, is kept in cabinets in a smaller room adjoining the great hall, which is also used as a study, and is fitted up with libraries. The Tunisian collection, as also a collection from Marocco, contains types of several new species and subspecies, and is especially rich in Larks and Chats, among the latter possessing several specimens of that rare, recently discovered species, *Saxicola seebohmi*. The museum also has its working-rooms and a curator.

Whitaker has also, this year, been again successful in breeding Porphyrios. A pair of these birds (*Porphyrio caruleus* Vandelli) made a nest on the ground among the stems of a clump of bamboos soon after the middle of last March, while I was staying at Malfitano. The nest was rather large, and was constructed chiefly of dry bamboo-leaves. I was never able to see the eggs, for from the time the first egg was laid one of the parent birds, and occasionally both, was always on the nest. I have since heard from Whitaker that the brood has been successfully hatched.

Yours &c.,

E. CAVENDISH TAYLOR.

Florence, April 20th, 1900.

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SIRS,—Although not a member of the B. O. U., I have for many years been a subscriber to 'The Ibis,' and possess the entire set from 1859 to the present date. This is my excuse for taking the liberty of offering a suggestion which will, I think, make your publication more useful to subscribers abroad.

It is only a small matter in connection with your valuable "Notices of Recent Ornithological Publications"—viz., that you should insert at the end of the title of book mentioned

the price. Very often one living at such a distance from London as I do has to write home for the price before knowing whether the work in question will come within the compass of his purse, thus wasting at least four months, which would be saved if the prices of books were appended to the notices. I may say that Colonial booksellers do not import technical books, for which there is a small sale, unless specially ordered.

Trusting you will forgive me for troubling you with this suggestion.

Yours &c.,

GEORGE HURST, M.B.

Bathurst, N.S.W.,

29th January, 1900.

[We have received other communications to the same effect, and when the new series commences it is probable that the Editors will endeavour to meet the wishes thus expressed. But it must be recollected that the separate copies which abound in ornithological literature are not usually on sale, and cannot be priced.—EDD.]

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SIRS,—On May 11th, 1900, Mr. George Bristow of this town asked me to examine a small Warbler which had been shot the day before and sent to him, along with some other small birds, from Ninfield, Sussex. On handling this bird “in the flesh,” I at once suspected it to be the Melodious Warbler, *Hypolais polyglotta* (Vieill.), and shortly afterwards, on taking Mr. Erust Hartert to view the specimen, he agreed with me in referring it to that species. Mr. Hartert was able to match it with examples of *H. polyglotta* from the south of France. More recently, Mr. Howard Saunders has examined the bird, and writes that he is quite satisfied that it has been rightly identified. It proved on dissection to be a male.

The present is the second record of the undoubted occurrence of *H. polyglotta* in the British Islands. Some remarks upon the range and distinctive features of the species will be found in ‘The Ibis,’ 1897, pp. 627, 628.



Although I heartily deplore the destruction of such ornamental visitors as the Hoopoe and the Avocet, and of such residents as the Chough and the Bearded Tit, I cannot entertain the same feelings in regard to the shooting of examples of such species as the Melodious Warbler. I do not think the passing observation of a species not easily identified should be accepted as sufficient evidence of its occurrence, except in a few cases. For instance, I have seen, *and heard*, as I believe, the closely allied *H. icterina* on two occasions in Sussex, but until the bird has been obtained I cannot ask others to accept my identification.

Yours &c.,

W. RUSKIN BUTTERFIELD.

4 Stanhope Place,  
St. Leonard's-on-Sea,  
28th May, 1900.

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*New Fossil Bird from the Stonesfield Slate.*—At the meeting of the Geological Society on March 21st last, Prof. Seeley described a supposed new fossil bird from the Stonesfield Slate as follows:—

“During his residence at Oxford the late Earl of Emskillen made a collection of Ornithosaurian bones from Stonesfield, which was acquired by the British Museum in 1866. Among these is one identified by the author in 1899 as the right humerus of a bird about as large as a Flamingo. The bone is complete, except for fracture through the proximal articulation, and the specimen is, on the whole, well preserved. The chief characters available for comparison are the form of the shaft, the character of the proximal end, especially the ulnar tuberosity and the radial crest, and the form of the distal end. The character which first showed the fossil to be a bird was the ulnar tuberosity; probably the Flamingo approaches as closely as any living genus to the Stonesfield fossil in this feature. The radial crest shows affinities with those of the Flamingo and the Eider-Duck. The impression left by the humero-cubital muscle on the external surface above the condyles is almost

identical with that seen in the Flamingo. 'The varied affinities of this large Carinate bird appear to lie midway between the Ducks and Geese on the one side, and the Herons and Flamingos on the other. It may be placed in a new family; but its characters are in all respects such as might have occurred in an existing bird. There is no indication of affinity to *Archæopteryx*, or that the bird diverged in any way from modern types.'"

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*Lecture on Albatrosses.*—At the Museum, Brassey Institute, on April 10th, Mr. Thomas Parkin, M.A., M.B.O.U., gave a lecture to the members of the Hastings and St. Leonard's Natural History Society on the Albatrosses. A special feature of the lecture was the exhibition of no fewer than fourteen out of the seventeen forms that are admitted to specific rank by ornithologists. This splendid exhibition was rendered possible by the kindness of the Hon. Walter Rothschild, M.P., of Tring, Herts, and also by the kind services of Dr. Ernst Hartert, the accomplished Director of the Museum there. Mr. Parkin further produced examples of the eggs of several of the species, some from his own cabinets, and others from the choice collections of Mr. Rothschild.

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*New Work on the Eggs of Australian Birds.*—The 'Catalogue of Nests and Eggs of the Birds of Australia,' by Mr. Alfred J. North, Ornithologist to the Australian Museum, which was published by the Trustees of the Australian Museum in 1889 as No. xii. of their series of Catalogues, is now out of print, and the Trustees have decided to issue a new work in an enlarged form by the same author. There will be representations of about 600 eggs on 30 full-sized plates, and arrangements are being made to have them hand-coloured for those who desire it. Some of the nests and breeding-haunts of the birds will also be shown on full-sized plates, but the greater number will be interspersed among the text, where also many the birds themselves will be figured. The photographs, from which the plates representing the nests are made, have mostly been taken by

the author personally, many of them *in situ*, and show the actual surroundings of the birds' homes. The black and white drawings of the birds are by Mr. Neville Cayley, so well known for his life-like drawings and paintings of birds. The letterpress will contain descriptions of the birds, their nests, eggs, and haunts, and an account of their life-history.

The preparation of the plates is now well advanced. The work will be issued in parts, as the letterpress can be got ready. The price to subscribers will probably not exceed 25 shillings for the complete work, uncoloured.

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*Capt. Boyd Alexander.*—Our excellent correspondent Capt. Boyd Alexander, of the 7th Rifle Brigade (who is always somewhere "in the front"), has been seconded, and has left England for service with the Gold-Coast Constabulary. In a letter, dated on board the R.M.S.S. 'Jebba,' on May 22nd, he writes that he was expecting to join the Relief Column for Coomassie at Cape Coast, and "hoped to see a little bit of active service." Just at present, he feared, he would hardly be able to make a collection of birds, but Capt. Alexander is sure to keep his eyes open.

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*The new Catalogue of Eggs.*—Mr. Oates's 'Catalogue of the Birds'-Eggs in the Collection of the British Museum,' the first volume of which is in the press, will make altogether four volumes, each with about 15 plates. The total number of specimens dealt with is estimated at 60,000. The classification of the 'Hand-list of Birds' will be followed. References to the particular eggs contained in the Collection will be added, together with descriptions, measurements, and other details.